

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 4947

To improve infrastructure in small towns and rural areas.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 6, 2018

Ms. ESTY of Connecticut (for herself, Mr. KATKO, Mr. FASO, and Mr. WELCH) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture

A BILL

To improve infrastructure in small towns and rural areas.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Infrastructure
5 Development and Partnerships Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. RURAL PARTNERSHIPS OFFICE.**

7 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in the
8 Department of Agriculture a Rural Partnerships Office (in
9 this section referred to as the “Office”).

10 (b) HEAD OF OFFICE.—The Office shall be headed
11 by a Director appointed by the President.

1 (c) DIRECT REPORTING TO SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE.—The Director shall report directly to the Secretary of Agriculture (in this section referred to as the “Secretary”).

5 (d) DUTIES.—The Secretary, through the Rural Partnerships Office, shall do the following:

7 (1) RURAL PARTNERS PROGRAM.—Establish and run a program to provide technical assistance to improve delivery, financing, operations, and maintenance of rural infrastructure, as follows:

11 (A) Through a competitive process, select not more than 5 organizations to serve as “on-call” providers of on-site technical assistance to rural communities.

15 (B) Solicit applications from rural communities for technical assistance with infrastructure planning, asset management, life-cycle accounting, project delivery, financing, regional coordination, and project oversight.

20 (C) Require an application for technical assistance from the program to include only a statement of the type of assistance requested, and of how the applicant believes the assistance would improve rural infrastructure, and any other information necessary to demonstrate the

1 ability of the rural community to participate in
2 the program.

3 (D) Involve the Rural Liaison in each rel-
4 evant Federal agency in the review of each ap-
5 plication for technical assistance from the pro-
6 gram.

7 (E) Assign a technical assistance team to
8 each applicant for technical assistance from the
9 program whose application is approved by the
10 Secretary, which shall provide the assistance for
11 a period of not more than 2 years, with the goal
12 that technical assistance personnel will be on-
13 site in the rural community for a significant
14 portion of that period, and require the team to
15 submit to the Secretary and the Rural Liaison
16 in each relevant Federal agency quarterly re-
17 ports which summarize the activities of, and
18 progress made by, the team during the quarter,
19 including an accounting of for how much time
20 the team spent in the community.

21 (F) Coordinate the program with the Rural
22 Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Program
23 carried out under section 306(a)(22) of the
24 Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act
25 (7 U.S.C. 1926(a)(22)), technical assistance

provided out under section 1442 of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300j-1), the program for assistance for capacity building for community development and affordable housing under section 4 of the HUD Demonstration Act of 1993 (42 U.S.C. 9816 note), and any other activities under which technical assistance may be provided so as to affect rural infrastructure, in order to avoid duplication of effort.

(2) BEST PRACTICES CLEARINGHOUSE.—Establish an online clearinghouse of best practices specifically targeted to rural infrastructure planning, asset management, life-cycle accounting, project delivery, funding and financing, regional coordination, and project oversight, including resources prepared by Federal agencies and other sources.

(3) GRANTS.—Make grants to assist rural communities in developing cost-effective infrastructure projects, with particular focus on regionally coordinated or bundled projects, and require an application for such a grant to include only such documentation as is necessary to demonstrate the potential for a viable project, and to be submitted by the State, local, or regional governmental entity with primary responsibility for the project.

1 (4) COORDINATION OF RURAL LIASIONS.—Fa-
2 cilitate coordination of the Rural Liaisons to de-
3 velop, to the extent practical, common guidelines for
4 rural funding or financing programs at the various
5 Federal agencies, as well as to identify opportunities
6 to work across agencies to support rural infrastruc-
7 ture needs.

8 (5) ANNUAL REPORTS.—Within 60 days after
9 the end of each fiscal year, publish an annual report
10 on the activities of the Office during the preceding
11 fiscal year, including the status of activities funded
12 or assisted under the technical assistance program,
13 and submit a copy of the report to the Committee
14 on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and
15 the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and For-
16 estry of the Senate.

17 **SEC. 3. RURAL LIAISONS.**

18 (a) DESIGNATION IN EACH FEDERAL AGENCY.—The
19 head of each Federal agency that provides financial assist-
20 ance to a rural community for an activity related to rural
21 infrastructure, shall designate a Rural Liaison in the
22 agency.

23 (b) DUTIES.—The Rural Liaison in a Federal agency
24 shall do the following:

1 (1) Review regulations of, guidance provided by,
2 and procedures of the agency to identify any that
3 present a hardship for a rural community, and rec-
4 ommend ways to alleviate the hardship.

5 (2) Participate in the review of applications re-
6 ferred to in section 2(d)(1)(C).

7 (3) Serve as an ombudsperson for any rural
8 community to which the agency is providing finan-
9 cial assistance, to help address issues and resolve
10 problems.

11 (4) Meet regularly with other Rural Liaisons to
12 coordinate efforts and identify ways to work together
13 to support rural infrastructure needs.

14 **SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.**

15 In this Act:

16 (1) **RELEVANT FEDERAL AGENCY.**—The term
17 “relevant Federal agency” means, with respect to an
18 application for technical assistance, each Federal
19 agency that provides financial assistance to a rural
20 community for an activity related to rural infra-
21 structure with respect to which the technical assist-
22 ance is sought.

23 (2) **RURAL AREA.**—The term “rural area”
24 means any area located outside an urbanized area

1 (as defined by the Bureau of the Census) with a
2 population of 50,000 or more.

3 (3) RURAL COMMUNITY.—The term “rural
4 community” means any community located in a
5 rural area.

6 (4) RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE.—The term
7 “rural infrastructure” means surface, maritime, air
8 transportation, water, wastewater, broadband, and
9 energy facilities and operations, and public build-
10 ings, including schools, in a rural area.

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